9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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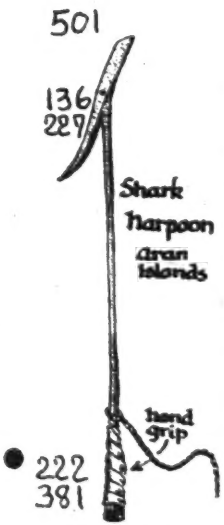
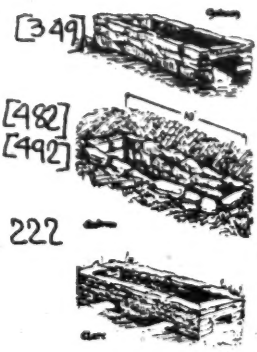


Fig. 100.
Total length 50"

as of other branches of the sciences of humanity that we know more of the ways of remote peoples of the world that we do of our own folk (Figs. 97 and 98, and Plate VI).

Before leaving the sea and coming back to shore, brief reference must be made to some other sea-creatures which have contributed to the economy of the coasts. There is the basking shark of the Aran Islands pursued in curraghs and captured with a harpoon of the type shown in Figure 100. Seals, despite the many superstitions attaching to them, have been hunted for their skins; according to an old account the skins were made into covers for the oval curraghs of the Rosses in Donegal. It is recorded that seal-catchers in Co. Cork wore on their arms "bags quilted with charcoal." The seals when they bite are said to let go the hold when they hear the crunch of the charcoal.

Shore-collecting plays a varied if nowadays greatly reduced part in the life of coastal communities. The great days of kelp-burning, when the strong dense smoke drifted far inland, are no more, but this once flourishing industry has left its traces in half-ruined kelp-kilns (Fig. 101) and in various rusting hooks and drags (102, 103) which betray the keen rivalry shown in gathering the crop. The best weeds (tangle or "fyams," that is, *Laminaria*) were cut in deep water and their value was enhanced if they were free of sand. The men would sometimes have their knives and sickles fitted with handles as much as twenty feet long: women and children with back creels, assisted by donkeys or ponies with side-creels, did the carrying. In Aran the creel women protect their backs from the damp seaweed by wearing a goatskin.



Kelp Kilns
Fig. 101.

Carting or "drawing" the wrack for manuring the fields is still an active industry in spring on most Irish shores. The wrack is often carried some miles inland, and there are many stories of the contraband goods once smuggled from the coast under cover of loads of piled wrack. In Carlingford Lough, where the tides run high, wide stretches of foreshore are "planted" with rows of boulders in orderly fields called "plans." The bladderwrack which grows on the stones is

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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cut with toothed sickles in spring: as in parts of Connacht great rafts of cut seaweed, bound with a rope or with a sugán of wrack, are floated ashore on the flood tide. Seaweed is highly valued as a manure for potatoes on the sandy soils of low-lying coasts—"the potatoes are well-salted before they are gathered"—and it is said to swell the tubers so that they can be readily peeled by machinery. Since in addition the watery potatoes absorb little fat in frying, they are in great demand by the fish-and-chip shops: the export from south Down, for instance, goes largely to the mining districts of south Wales.

Fig. 102.

Fig. 103.
Scale as for Fig. 102.

Some seaweeds are boiled and fed to cattle, other varieties are considered good for pigs, while several kinds are gathered for human consumption:—the strong-tasting dulse, dried and sold in sea-side shops and fairs, purple laver (sloke) and carrageen. I have no evidence for Ireland, but Pennant states that the goatherds of nearby Jura used to make cheese without salt, "lapped in tang and salted with the ashes of sea tang."

Shell-fish of many species—especially winkles—are gathered for home use and are exported in large quantities to England. Young and old may be seen gleaning among the stones at spring tides, and I have known large families who are almost wholly dependent on this ancient strand-collecting life. The larger shells such as mussels and scallops had a variety of uses in the home. Crabs and lobsters caught in rock-holes might be included here, but the "lobster-pot" gets most of this harvest of the sea. Several types of pot are in use. In the north the round-topped netted frame has gained ground generally, but the stronger wicker pots (Fig. 104) are retained for crabs and for trapping bait. In the west the old styles hold their own while a cylindrical variety, probably of French origin, is found on the south coast. Mr. Brian O'Kelly informs me that the lobster-fishermen of west Cork prefer the round wicker pot, but that the netted frame is used in the south-east in addition to the cylindrical variety. The netted frame differs from the type found in the north in that the entrance is on top or at one end instead of at the side.

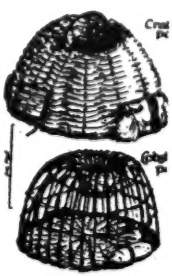


Fig. 104.
Upper, Antrim.
Lower, Kerry.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

from plants growing in the district as formerly, but are imported. 286
There are several weavers in the district, and the clothes are made up by a local tailor. One unusual occupation, that of cloth miller or presser is carried on by a man in Belmullet, who uses a rather primitive press of his own construction.

There is very little regular employment for labourers, except 464
that given by a few of the resident gentry and some of the people of Belmullet. Labourers receive 1*s.* 6*d.* a day, or a 1*s.* and their [465]
food; if at harvest time, threshing or employed at cutting turf, slightly more, about 2*s.* a day.

Little or no work is done by the majority of the men during the [222]
winter months, except to gather a little drift weed along the coast.

The women attend to the ordinary duties of the house, assist at 462
field work and at bringing home turf; they gather and dry carrageen moss (*sphærococcus crispus*) which they sell at the rate of 2*s.* a stone (unbleached); they also card and spin the wool. Old women often get employment going from house to house oiling, carding, and [887]
spinning the wool for the household; for this work they receive 2*s.* a week and their keep.

2. *Family Life and Customs.*—The general characters of family life 871
are much the same as those of the people of Inishbofin.

The children, who are usually numerous, are sent to school, if at all, at about five years of age; they show plenty of aptness at acquiring knowledge, but as their attendance is very irregular, through their being wanted at home to help their parents, their progress is much impeded. When they reach the age of fourteen or fifteen years they leave school and enter into the regular work of the household until they have attained means either to marry and settle down or to emigrate.

Some few of the girls, after leaving school, go out as domestic 357
servants either in local situations or to England or Scotland.

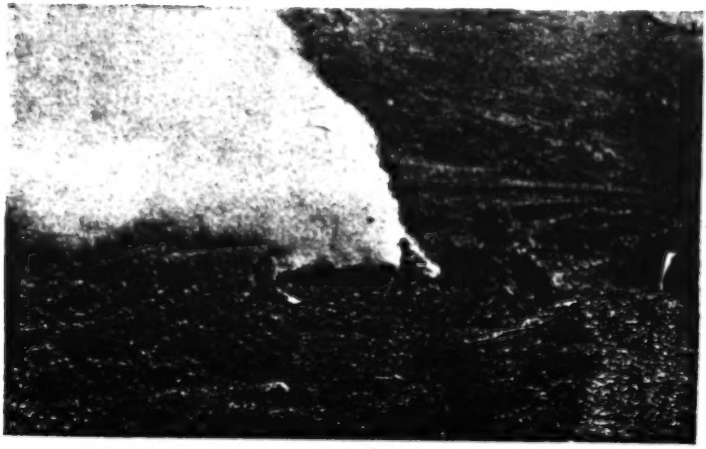
Both sexes usually marry young, the matches being arranged by 58
the parents, and money rather than romance being the chief element in the case, as a projected marriage is often abandoned owing to disputes between parents without the young people themselves being consulted in the matter. Love-making, except in the case of engaged couples, but seldom occurs, but that it does sometimes happen is [832]
shown by the number and variety of love-charms and omens. As in most other parts of Ireland the majority of marriages occur before Shrove. When full agreements have been made by the parents, the young man goes and asks the girl personally. If he be refused, he does

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Antrim

PLATE II

222
133

Kelp gatherers near Fair Head, Co. Antrim.



222
387

Kelp-burning, Co. Antrim.

[facing p. 160]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

and others were ceremonial; some may be no more than simple pastimes prompted by fancy. Rush baskets were in fact made until recently in some of the Hebridean islands for carrying the fishermen's bait and for holding fish. Baskets of birch twigs, dock stems, ragwort and thistles have also been recorded, and it should be recalled that several examples of grass, sedge, and even moss, made in a similar cross-twisted technique have been recorded from Bronze Age burials in Scotland. The cone-shaped hat of rushes or straw made by children (Fig. 86) recalls in shape at least the traditional headdress of the leprechauns, and it may be noticed that tall steeple hats and helmets seem to have been popular among the Irish down to the seventeenth century.[1] In Co. Kerry the rush hats are worn in mock fights and seem to be regarded as helmets.

Of all these rush toys, none is stranger than the butterfly cage (Fig. 70) which is deftly made by bending long rushes, held upright between the fingers, over others placed transversely. One side of the cage may be left open and a dock leaf inserted as a door. The ends of the rushes are bound together to make a handle. This pastoral plaything can be paralleled in many parts of the world: in the cages in which Spanish shepherd boys carry insects, in the little baskets of dried grass which the Indian herd children make for grasshoppers, in the locust traps which Greek boys, Theocritus tells us, used to weave out of asphodel stalks, and even among the nomads of the Gobi Desert, where, when the cicada begins to call in the great heat, 'every child cuts the desert grass to make a tiny cage to hold one of the fascinating tree-hoppers . . . The Gobi baby's rattle, too, is a hollow ball of twisted grass enclosing a large bead.'[2] The Irish rush rattle is provided with two hazel nuts. Some of the leaves and bracelets are plaited with four, six, nine, or even twelve strands, and a nine strand plait is also seen in one variety of three-cornered Briget's Cross (Fig. 85, 3; Pl. 13, 7).

The conical straw masks and the capes worn by strawboys (Chapter XX, Fig. 88) stripped of their gay ribbons, have been compared with the straw dresses of peasants in Spain or China, and, no doubt, they had their practical prototypes in Ireland.

[1] H. F. McClintock, *Old Irish and Highland Dress*, 88.
[2] M. Cable and F. French, *The Gobi Desert*, 100.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

243 789 is worth noticing that symbols in the form of a swastika, but including also circles, pentagrams and horses, were formerly cut as protective devices in the beams of barns in Scandinavia. Some of the designs are reminiscent of the art of the Bronze Age.

243 An Irish verse giving the four essentials of a good thrashing, collected in Co. Armagh, runs in translation:

[539]

A hand-staff of holly,
A souple of hazel,
A single sheaf,
And a clean floor.

This is where the besom of heather or bent comes in: it is still preferred to the sweeping-broom for a clay floor or to get into the joins of boards or cobbles. Thrashing was a daily job, carried out on well-run farms night and morning before the cattle were fed. It was held that the cattle throve best on freshly thrashed oats, and the storage of grain would anyhow have been difficult where there were no barns.[1] For this reason, too, the level 'street' in front of the house, or even the public road was often the most suitable floor available. The thrashing was usually done on a strong linen sheet. Publicity as well as a steady echoing beat seem to have been the desired aims. Everywhere prestige has attached to a noisy thrashing, and partly no doubt for self-aggrandisement a solitary thrasher would beat with his feet to make the noise of two. Everywhere too the sound of the flail has been turned into jingles and rustic rhymes. They did not accompany the work itself because it was too noisy and too exhausting to allow talking or singing. The flails' beaters made their own merry music; was it, one wonders, originally intended to drive away evil spirits from the precious food supply?

[555] [533]

● 222 824 In this chapter we have confined ourselves to some of the things that were made at home out of materials that lay to hand. To describe the utilization of all the lesser plants that have

[343] [1]Mr. A. T. Lucas, however, has described traditional outdoor granaries, now restricted to west Cork, constructed of thick straw ropes, which when completed resemble round stacks (*Gwerin*, I (1956), 2–20). Mr. V. B. Proudfoot calls my attention to the similar 'corn bykes' of Caithness (*P.S.A.S.* (1932), 136–7).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

figured in the economy of the farm or in medicinal and magical lore would be an almost endless task. One recalls that a group of Californian Indians practising a food-gathering economy is said to have made use of 176 species of wild plants for satisfying almost all their needs. A few examples of the survival of a collecting culture in Ireland may be given, taken from various sources such as Wood-Martin's pioneer work, but also from folk-memory. From the roots of ferns were extracted oils used in weaving, from those of the water lily, a cherished red dye, a substance for tanning from tormentil roots, and ink from the roots of flags (saggins). Bracken and wood ash were kept for making soap, and the ashes of thistles were the perquisite of the herdsmen. Large lake rushes provided materials for caulking boats and churns, and phragmites stems for winding yarn in the shuttle. Lady's bedstraw besides being rubbed on bee-skeps to attract a swarm, produced both dye and rennet. For cures we have the carrageen or Irish moss as well as the moss growing on crosses and other special stones, and a great number of flowers and herbs. Yarrow, in Irish, is called 'the herb of the seven cures'. But the sovereign remedy was the essence of all wild flowers contained in what was euphemistically known as 'all-flower water', i.e., cow's urine.[1] We shall return to these topics in Chapter XXI.

[1]W. G. Wood-Martin, *The Elder Faiths*, 2, 183.

Note. Mr. A. T. Lucas has recently published accounts of hurling balls made of cowhair (see *J.C.H. and A. Soc.*, 57, 99–104; 59, 78–81).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

XVI

WRACK AND WRECK

000 NO part of Ireland is more than sixty miles from the sea and its most populous districts have for ages been strung along the shore. This is as true today for Co. Donegal as it is for Co. Dublin. Yet we think of the seashore as the most natural part of our scenic heritage, the zone least affected by the hand of man which, inland, has wrought massive changes and turned forests into bogs and farmlands. True the great headlands must have presented to ancient man much the same majestic outlines as we admire today, but the lowlying stretches of coast, unstable in the face of erosion and deposition, have been considerably modified also by human interference. Deep in the ancient beach deposits and layer upon layer in the sand-hills where we picnic and play lie the relics of ancient shore dwellers. It was here of necessity that man found his first foothold on the island, to it he has clung and to it inlanders have returned to satisfy a variety of needs. Here by the shore man has gathered cockles and mussels, dug for bait and reaped the harvests of wreck and wrack, here he has built weirs and traps for fish, slips and shelters for boats, racks for drying nets and kilns for burning seaweed. Here too he was wont to hold festival with rites and games in seasonal gatherings long before port cities blocked the estuaries and holiday crowds thronged the open beaches. Easter and Harvest were the old times of festival, when the moon was full and the tides ran low.

● 222 231 A teeming population of shellfish was the shore's first attraction, a steady supply of food supplemented at the nesting season by seabirds and their eggs and in summer by the anadromous fish seeking fresh water. In hard winters and late

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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springs when fodder was scarce cattle, sheep and horses found edible seaweed on the shore. Scottish planters in Co. Down found that their sheep 'kept fat and wholesome all winter and spring by feeding on the oare.'[1] This is nowadays one of nature's neglected resources partly, no doubt, owing to enclosure and the loss of grazing rights. It has been claimed as the result of experiments that the feeding value of *Ascophyllum nodosum* (knob wrack), which grows towards high tide mark, is almost equal to that of meadow hay. Certain species of seaweed are still, however, gathered for human consumption—carrageen or Irish moss (*Chondrus crispus*) sloke or laver (*Porphyra*), dulse (*Rhodymenia*) and dulaman (probably chanelled weed)—whether as medicine or 'kitchen', that is a tasty morsel to be chewed between meals, or boiled to be eaten with potatoes. In lean times the kitchen might become the staple, and a writer in the 1830's stated that when the potatoes gave out 'hundreds of the people may be seen going to the seaside to gather dulaman.'[2] Carrageen, besides being made into a jelly possessing many virtues, was used as a thickener for milk.

The most profitable way of exploiting seaweed down to recent times was for the burning of kelp, which became a considerable business among shore-dwellers in the eighteenth century as the growth of industry stimulated the production of soap, bleaching materials and glass: more recently kelp was chiefly in demand for the preparation of iodine. But there are dimly remembered ways of utilizing seaweed ashes in the home which would make kelp-burning a traditional occupation. In the Western Isles of Scotland kelp-burning is said to have been introduced from Ireland about 1735, but there too it must have been an ancient custom, for Martin Martin tells us at the end of the seventeenth century that seals, seafowl and fish were preserved in 'the ashes of burnt seaware'.[3] (Cheese, we learn, was preserved in the same way, or 'lapped in tang'). Kelp was made by burning the thick stems of tangle (*Laminaria*) or other coarse weeds—to which, as well as to the ashes, the name kelp is applied—which are thrown up in the winter storms or

[1] W. Montgomery, *Description of Ards Barony* (1683), 139.
[2] J. Binns, *Miseries and Beauties*, 1, 50.
[3] Martin Martin, *The Western Isles*, 135, 159.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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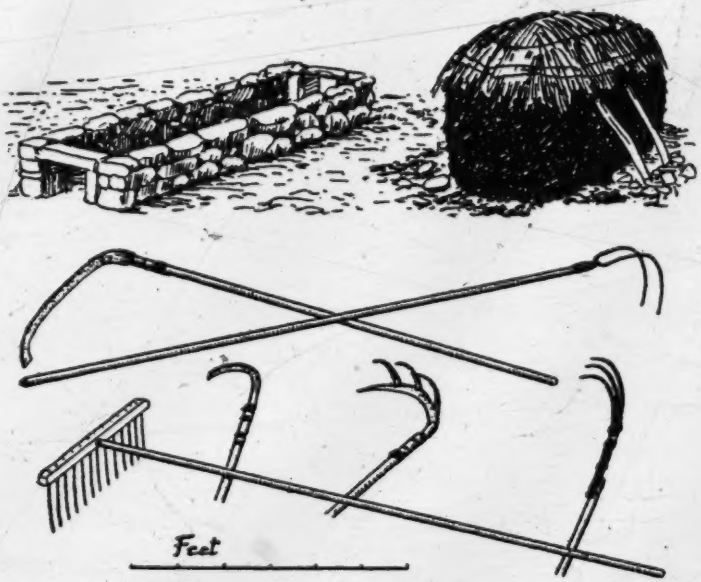
222 cut at low tide. The weeds were dried on low stone walls and ricked and thatched until ready for the kiln on summer days. Rain rots the weeds, so that in wet weather the heavy kelp had to be shaken and turned repeatedly until it could be safely ricked. The half obliterated ruins of drying-walls and kilns made of sea-boulders can be seen on stormy beaches all around the coast (Fig. 73). In the early decades of the century the

[417]



[413]

FIG. 73. Kelp harvest. Kelp kiln and stack. Co. Galway. Hooks, knives and drags, west and south coasts (See Pl. 11).

dense oily smoke from the kilns drifting far inland was a familiar sight, each kiln burning for many hours and consuming several tons of weed, which was fed in a little at a time. It is said that 60 tons of weed are required to provide 1 ton of kelp, and the work was both arduous and filthy. If the supply of drift-weed failed the heavy tangles were laboriously dragged ashore or cut with knives mounted on handles up to twenty feet long to reach the best weeds, free of sand, growing in deep water. A

[413]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

combined knife and drag found in Connacht has three heavy hooks attached to a strong sickle-shaped blade mounted on a 12-ft. pole (Fig. 73). Powerful long-handled scythes and great hand-rakes with teeth a foot long were used on the south coast. In Donegal the men would wield their long knives from curraghs while the women dragged the weed ashore.

In the Rosses of west Donegal around 1750 the rents were paid in kelp: any surplus was bartered for 'the two luxuries, spirits and tobacco, enjoyed by men and women alike.'[1] For the lesser weeds growing in shallow water ordinary sickles were employed when the tide was low, but these species made inferior kelp. Yet in some areas, for example Strangford Lough, stones were planted on the shore to grow wrack for kelp burning: Arthur Young commented on this practice in 1776.[2] Old seaweed beds may be seen also in Lough Swilly, Clew Bay, Achill Sound and probably elsewhere.

Today the most remarkable area of cultivated weed is near the mouth of Carlingford Lough in County Down, where at low tide a wide stretch of mud and sand is exposed in Mill Bay. It is grown solely to supply fertilizer for the potato crop. Wrack rights are mentioned in grants of land in County Down as far back as 1506, but the earliest reference I have found to the cultivated weed in Carlingford Lough is in a guidebook of 1846. As we have seen, however, Arthur Young refers to the growing of wrack for kelp-burning in Strangford Lough, and since the best species for kelp grow in deeper water the planting of seaweed beds is not likely to have originated with the kelp industry. Through the second half of last century some 1,100 beds, covering well over a square mile in area, were maintained in Mill Bay, and it was not until the depression between the two world wars that they began to be neglected. Today the use of wrack has almost entirely given way to artificial fertilizers, with a great easement of labour but a loss of annually renewed organic matter in the soil. The wrackbeds, or 'plans', are half-acre rectangles set with rows of boulders a foot or so in diameter, but many beds are subdivided into small 'cuts' for sub-letting, and the Estate Map showing the beds has the

[1] A. B., *The Rosses in 1753*, 201.
[2] A. Young, *Tour*, 1, 194.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

minutely fragmented appearance of land held in rundale. Rights of access, by narrow lanes between the beds, were often disputed, and there were occasions for fights when as many as a hundred carts from forty townlands might converge on Mill Bay at low tide. I first heard of the seaweed beds from an Air Force pilot who brought me air photographs of what he thought was submerged farmland: the little rectangular fields of Mourne seemed to march out beneath the sea.[1] In fact they were necessary adjuncts to the arable land, and the rents of up to twenty pounds an acre were often higher than those paid for the fields of coarse sand and gravel which the wrack enriched. An auctioneer told me he had sold a wrackbed of one Irish acre for £145 not many years ago. Nearly all of the several hundred farmers who had wrack rights here held two or three beds, and each man's plans were scattered so that he had different kinds of weed growing on them: 'knob wrack' close inshore, then 'bladder wrack' and farther out still the 'lazy wrack' whose fronds are submerged at high water even at neaps and which therefore grows faster than the other species.

The crop was harvested with knives and sickles between March and June, the bare-footed reapers at the same time lifting, turning and re-setting the heavy boulders which tend to get buried in the sand. Carts too are liable to sink, and when the going is too soft the weed is rafted ashore. It is allowed to float on the incoming tide and a boat dragging a rope pulls the load together and tows it ashore. Very large rafts, secured by a rope of seaweed, used to be floated ashore on the tide in Mayo. Patrick Knight, describing Ballycroy about 1830, observed that the steersman, armed with a pole, might be seen 'sitting on the heap, roasting his potatoes and shellfish'.[2]

The great bulk of the wrack taken all round the coast for manure was driftweed thrown up during storms, but the supply was often supplemented by cutting or pulling weed from the rocks, and in some places there were complicated methods of regulating and distributing the harvest. On a stretch of coast familiar to me in south Down one can pick out strips running out into the sea, demarcated by marked boulders. They were

[1] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, ch. 15.
[2] P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands*, 99.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

formerly allotted to tenants in proportion to the acreages of their farm holdings. The weed had to be carried away among the slippery boulders in back-creels and hand-barrows and stacked on the beach ready for the carts and creel-asses. The driftweed cast up by the storms of winter was more accessible but its division gave rise to endless disputes and was often regulated by careful procedure and the casting of lots, though some beaches were subdivided by standing stones. In Donegal I was told how at low tide, by the light of lanterns, men would dash into the sea up to their necks to drag out the floating weed. It is an interesting example of manorial privilege that on one beach, below the Norman castle at Greencastle, County Down, all the wrack blown in after 17th March goes to the farm which occupies the ruined castle. Every little bay where the weed collects has its wrack road leading down (Fig. 4), and fields near the shore may have a seaweed gate giving direct access. From Christmas onwards a careful watch was kept on the weather, and a spirit of excitement spread inland from the shore as the wind rose. Every bay has its own particular wind, blowing from 'the right art', for a good yield of wrack. (For kelp, however, an offshore wind was needed, because it is the returning undertow which brings the deeper weeds ashore). There are many accounts of the extraordinary zeal of the wrack gatherers and their feats of endurance. Even English visitors were forced to admit that 'it would be impossible to witness a scene of greater industry than was being enacted by these lazy Irish'.[1]

As on other occasions when men left their lonely farms and gathered together there was much merry-making and noisy recollection of past wrack harvests. One cannot doubt that the harvest of the fields, its 'luck' as well as its bounty, was felt to depend on success in this first step in the farming year. The desire to be first and the intense rivalry were prompted by motives stronger than the wish for material gain. In Scotland one reads of the great anxiety that was shown to secure the first load of wrack on New Year's Day, and on that day a portion of seaweed was laid at the doors of the farmstead and in each of the fields.[2] In Jersey the *vraic* (wrack) harvest is

[1] J. H. Tuke, *A Visit to Donegal and Connaught*, 54.
[2] M. Banks, *British Calendar Customs: Scotland*, 2, 97.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

described as a gathering of the whole people, a time of feasting and festivals and courting. That there was magic as well as manure in the golden weed is apparent from the urge to possess some share, however small, of the harvest. In the kingdom of Mourne 'men would walk three miles to be present at the division of the wrack and were content to take back a single creelful on their backs. They would gather the bits of wrack on their knees, scraping them up with their hands as though it was gold dust.'[1] Here the division was by lot following a given signal—in one case a bush hoisted on a tall pole—for the farmers concerned to assemble. Wrack rights and ways of access are sometimes still bitterly fought over though they now have little meaning.

Spring was also the season for gathering other gifts of the sea, the shellfish and the shell sand which was carted inland and even taken on horseback for distances of up to thirty miles. Prized because 'it cut up the clay', it also provided much needed lime for acid soils. In South Donegal boatloads of mussels used to be scraped off the rocks with spades and distributed in creels for spreading on the potato ridges. In Dundalk Bay, Mr. H. G. Tempest tells me, mussels for the table and for bait are scraped up from boats with long-handled rakes (Fig. 74). Easter and Good Friday in particular were times for visiting the shore. Of the now deserted Blasket Islands Thomas O'Crohan writes: 'it has always been the custom here to go and get kitchen from the strand to eat on Good Friday.'[2] Winkles (willucks) were the favourite food on these occasions, but after St. Patrick's Day, they say, limpets are better eating than winkles. Shellfish were boiled in milk to give food for children and for calves. Sandeels were pulled up with a bent iron rod or a blunted sickle: in Mayo 'they are taken on moonlit nights by considerable gatherings of young people, the object being as much the amusement as the sandeels'.[3] In Donegal 'for scallops and oysters, when the tide was out, the young women waded into the sea, some of them naked, and by armfuls brought them to the shore.'[4]

[1] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, 144.
[2] T. O'Crohan, *The Islandman*, 29.
[3] C. R. Browne, *Ballycroy*.
[4] A. B., *The Rosses in 1753*, 201.

[Text continues on p. 226]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

223 Faeroe Islands[1] were practised in a region which has so many culture parallels with the northern isles.

225 Down to recent times coast-dwellers also took their toll of seals and porpoises. 'We thought more of a seal in those days', wrote Thomas O'Crohan of the Blaskets, 'than of the very best pig.'[2] They were valued too for their skins, which as we have mentioned made covers for the curraghs and shoes for the rock-climbers. Seal hunting was dangerous work, sometimes in-[481] volving swimming into the underwater caves where they breed. The seal catchers in County Cork wore 'bags quilted with [292] charcoal' on their arms, for the animals let go their hold when they bit on the crunching charcoal.[3] In the Blaskets porpoises were slaughtered after being driven ashore by boats, and then 'everyone was crimson with the blood of the sea-pigs'.[4] The [251] meat was salted down.

226 Crabs and lobsters, like so many other seafoods, are now neglected and even despised, though there are commercial [228] fisheries in areas accessible to markets. Apart from creel fishing they were formerly taken from the rock holes where they lie, either by hand or with an iron hook. In County Kerry one man would hold another under the water with an oar while he [481] searched the holes. The old-style pots or creels are circular, [227] with a flat weighted bottom, sometimes hinged: the principle rods are of hazel or even whin, the woven sides of sally, laurel or heather stems. They vary in pattern from one district to another, as do the round-topped rectangular net-creels which have taken their place almost everywhere (Fig. 76). The lobstermen are a hardy breed, many of them having turned [578] from long-line fishing, and they have kept up the feuds and rivalries to which the long-liners were addicted. In both types of fishing the search for bait is an exacting occupation. I illustrate a special fork used for digging lug worms, and also a mussel rake (Fig. 74).

● 222 674 If it is difficult to obtain information about the history of such tools and activities as these, which have been the concern

[1] K. Williamson, *The Atlantic Islands*, ch. 6. [Text continues on p. 232]
[2] T. O'Crohan, *The Islandman*, 99.
[3] E. Wakefield, *An Account of Ireland*, 2, 127.
[4] T. O'Crohan, op. cit., 12.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

222 674 of the common people and have not been caught in the net of written records, it is still harder to throw light on some of the darker aspects of shore life. Both smuggling and wrecking have almost everywhere at one time or another been regarded as legitimate methods of obtaining food and acquiring goods from the sea. A dread harvest from ships sunk by enemy action was reaped with seeming callousness during two world wars by coastal dwellers who would risk their own lives in the process. Driftwood has always been an acceptable gift, and many a fisherman's cabin is roofed with ship's timbers and its fittings augmented with ship's furniture. Nearly all these varied shore activities demand a measure of co-operation, and one finds that communal schemes of one kind and another and old ways and beliefs live long among folk who have to deal with the sea. Collective effort is necessary in hauling boats and handling nets, and while there are traditional rivalries between different coastal settlements each one tends to be a closely knit community displaying a strong spirit of independence. They were often able to resist the repressive hand of landlords and they still remain suspicious of the efforts of government bodies to improve their lot.

222 476

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16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

tudes and practices; for the islanders do not wish to jeopardize unemployment assistance and old age benefits, nor to be taxed in the future, and thus closely guard sources and amounts of income, even from relatives and friends.

Division of Labor

The division of labor between the sexes is more dichotomous today than it was at the turn of the century, when there was an extensive sharing of the same tasks by men and women. The latter now restrict their economic activities to the home, for the most part, especially if they must care for infants and young children. As soon as children can speak and walk, they help their mothers perform household chores and run errands, such as carrying messages and procuring groceries in the shops. But at age seven, following First Communion, boys spend less time with their mothers and come to take on small jobs which throw them more and more into contact with their older brothers, their fathers, and other men of the island. By the time young adolescents pass Confirmation and leave school, at the time of puberty, they are able to perform most adult economic tasks, and their labor is of utmost importance to the family.

Among the major jobs performed by women outside of the household round, and these by only a few younger women, are cleaning fish, carrying seaweed, planting potatoes, haying, growing vegetables, feeding and milking cattle, and caring for poultry. They also knit, crochet, ready wool for weaving, and tailor clothes for themselves and their families, as well as make sweaters, belts, and shawls for sale. In the several homes which accommodate tourists during the summer months, most of the responsibilities for their care fall on the women of the household. Men also do the tasks associated with fishing, farming, and the care of large livestock just listed, and they participate in the job of thickening wool; all of the other subsistence and income activities are exclusively male ones.

In the past, when fishing was a more practiced and laborious occupation than it is now, women not only aided men gut and cure fish, but they baited lines and did other affiliated chores as well. They also participated to a greater degree than today in collecting seaweed and in planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops of all varieties. Their involvement in the economic life of the island often demanded that they transport heavy loads manually for long distances, especially when they cared for all of the needs of both large and small livestock and aided in kelp-making. It is not difficult to comprehend why women are mystified at the complaints of their single daughters about the hardships that young married women must endure.

Most folk admit that members of the present generation work less strenuously than did those of two generations ago, when harsh landlords rather than a benevolent government intruded so importantly into their lives. There is in Inis Beag a widespread feeling of guilt among men, seldom expressed openly, about being "lazy." It is my observation that island men, on the whole, put in fewer hours of labor and expend less energy than workers in a typical industrial plant in America. Inis Beag emigrants who return from England for visits invariably

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

241 soil covered. There was little "field-making" at the beginning of this century, and
[731] few plots south of the terrace crest were utilized for farming. Fields on the terraces were planted yearly with potatoes and other vegetables, but in the 1920s the "eelworm" parasite invaded the island and forced the present custom of
[659] fallowing plots for at least four years. This development necessitated the creation of new fields at the back, and when the government began to subsidize field making during the 1930s, and fence construction later on, another impetus to the manu-
[114] facture of additional land was provided. Most of the literature pertaining to Inis Beag, influenced by nativism and primitivism, claims that field and fence building has proceeded for centuries (even millennia) and disavows the existence of indigenous soils.

221 The year in Inis Beag commences in February with the advent of spring,
• 222 when seaweed is gathered, fields are manufactured, and crops are planted. Although
241 some seaweed is collected in the summer and autumn and stored in "cocks" near the shore or in outbuildings for later use, most of it is cut and pulled in January
[133] and February at the time of spring tides. There is a maximum 15¾ feet difference between flood and ebb spring tides in Inis Beag, and normally submerged reefs rich in seaweed are bared three to four hours daily for two or three days twice each month. The men await a "good strand" to gather seaweed, when the tide is lowest during the daylight hours and not influenced by wave or swell action, for this is a dangerous task which sometimes demands wading in water thigh deep. The folk are amused greatly by a sequence from a noted film about them depicting a woman carrying seaweed along the coast during a raging storm; the footage was created by the producer to satisfy esthetic canons and to portray the primitive and Celtic virtues.

241 The generic term for natural fertilizers is "manure" and includes seaweed, compost, and guano. The islanders also use chemical fertilizers to some extent, particularly in areas where soils are deficient in manganese. Compost varies much in composition and may include human and animal feces, called "dung," turf ashes, and decaying vegetable matter, such as ferns and the sod "scraws" of thatched roofs
[514] being dismantled. Nowhere in the literature is the use of human manure mentioned, and the folk are extremely secretive about its use, as they also are about burning cow dung for fuel in times of emergency. Their reticence about disclos-
[654] ing these practices is a product of sexual puritanism. Young farmers are more willing than their elders to follow the advice of the Department of Agriculture agent stationed in a neighboring island, and are coming to use chemical fertilizers more commonly than was the case in the past. The islanders eschew artificial commodities which impinge on the human body, and often I have heard chemical fertilizers denounced because they supposedly are manufactured from "bones of evil persons buried in cemeteries" on the Continent, or victims of the plague centuries ago. Some farmers hold artificial fertilizers to blame for both the potato blight and the eelworm parasite.

824 Four kinds of seaweed are utilized by the folk: ribbon weed, string weed or sea thong, red or May weed, and black weed or bladder wrack. The most commonly used variety is red weed, once the major source of kelp, which is washed in
[437] the year around and is stripped of its leaves when collected. Its stems are known

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

as "sea rods" and are accumulated by several islanders, dried, and shipped by small boat in May or June to a factory on the mainland to be processed for their iodine content. One man received 90 pounds for his sea rods in the spring of 1960. Ribbon and black weed usually are cut at the time of planting and are carried immediately to the fields, while the other two types are pulled throughout the year and stacked along the coast or in outbuildings. The most effective seaweed fertilizer is black weed, because its "sap" permeates the soil most rapidly; but it and string weed are in short supply in Inis Beag and are most available to Terrace villagers.

Any landowner can collect seaweed on the strand and along the shore bordering the western part of the common land. So much red weed washed ashore on the easily accessible beach during December of 1959 that men from all four villages gathered it during the Christmas season, when work usually is at a standstill. Along the rest of the Inis Beag coast, areas for seaweed collecting are assigned to each village and to every family holding land within the community. Low Village gathers along the west sound, although a short strip of shoreline is assigned to High; Castle and High have collection rights along the eastern portion of the common land, and they also gather from the Atlantic coast near the ends of the roads leading from their respective communities; and, Terrace obtains its seaweed along the east sound, except for areas near the lighthouse assigned to Castle families. Long ago, a portion of the Quarter of the Castle was assigned to the Quarter of the Lake, but the traditional seaweed rights near the lighthouse were maintained.

On days suited for seaweed collecting, the coastline of Inis Beag is alive with moving forms during the several hours that the tide has ebbed. Men wade out on the bared reefs to cut or pull plants, which they pile in woven sally rod baskets, called "creels," and carry to horses and asses tethered on the paths above "high water mark." Sometimes a man will lead his ass to the edge of the water and load it directly, if footing is secure, and he may be aided in the task of carrying creels by his wife and children. The weed then is transported to the fields and dried on the fences or placed directly on the "gardens;" weed which has been stored from the previous year also is spread on the plots, sometimes several weeks before seeding takes place. There is a wide difference of opinion among farmers as to whether or not seaweed should be put down dry, and, if spread, how long it should be exposed to rain before "rotting" dispels the "juices." The same differences of opinion mark the evaluation of the efficacy of various fertilizers and their use at the several stages of "setting" a garden.

One of the tasks of the agricultural agent is to test soils and advise farmers as to which kinds of seaweed and other fertilizers are best suited for their land. But he seldom is consulted, and if his advice is sought, it is more often than not disregarded. Family and village traditions still guide farming procedures to a great extent, and experimentation is a rarity. Terrace Village farmers employ all four types of seaweed, in part because it is a village custom, but also because they have access to most of the string and black weed in the island. This practice is lauded by the agent as being scientifically the most effective; however, he takes no credit for the Terrace idiosyncracy. Among other important duties performed by